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ABSTRACT

This book describes the history of the Head Start program. Encouraged by Sargent Shriver, director of the Office of Economic Opportunity, in February, 1965, the Head Start Planning Commission presented a proposal for a program to the Johnson administration, which promoted it as a nationwide program to serve half a million poor children. By the time President Nixon took office, two research reports that examined the later school success of Head Start students and that were critical of Head Start were published. However, the Nixon administration continued to support the program, placing it under the Office of Child Development (OCD). Edward Zigler, the first OCD head, worked to improve parent participation in local Head Start programs; to support major child care legislation, ultimately vetoed by President Nixon; and to improve and diversify Head Start services. During the Carter Administration, proponents of Head Start, who believed poor families should have a power base separate from schools, successfully opposed the president's efforts to transfer the program to the Department of Education. While Head Start's budget remained intact during the Reagan years, the program's quality was eroded by increasing the number of children served with no increased funding, and decreasing hours and services. In 1990 both President Bush and Congress pledged full funding for the program. The book concludes with five recommendations: (1) provide full-quality Head Start; (2) recognize Head Start as a partner in welfare reform; (3) allow Head Start to serve infants and toddlers; (4) revamp Chapter 1 to sustain Head Start benefits in elementary school; and (5) raise income eligibility guidelines. (BC)